

euroforum

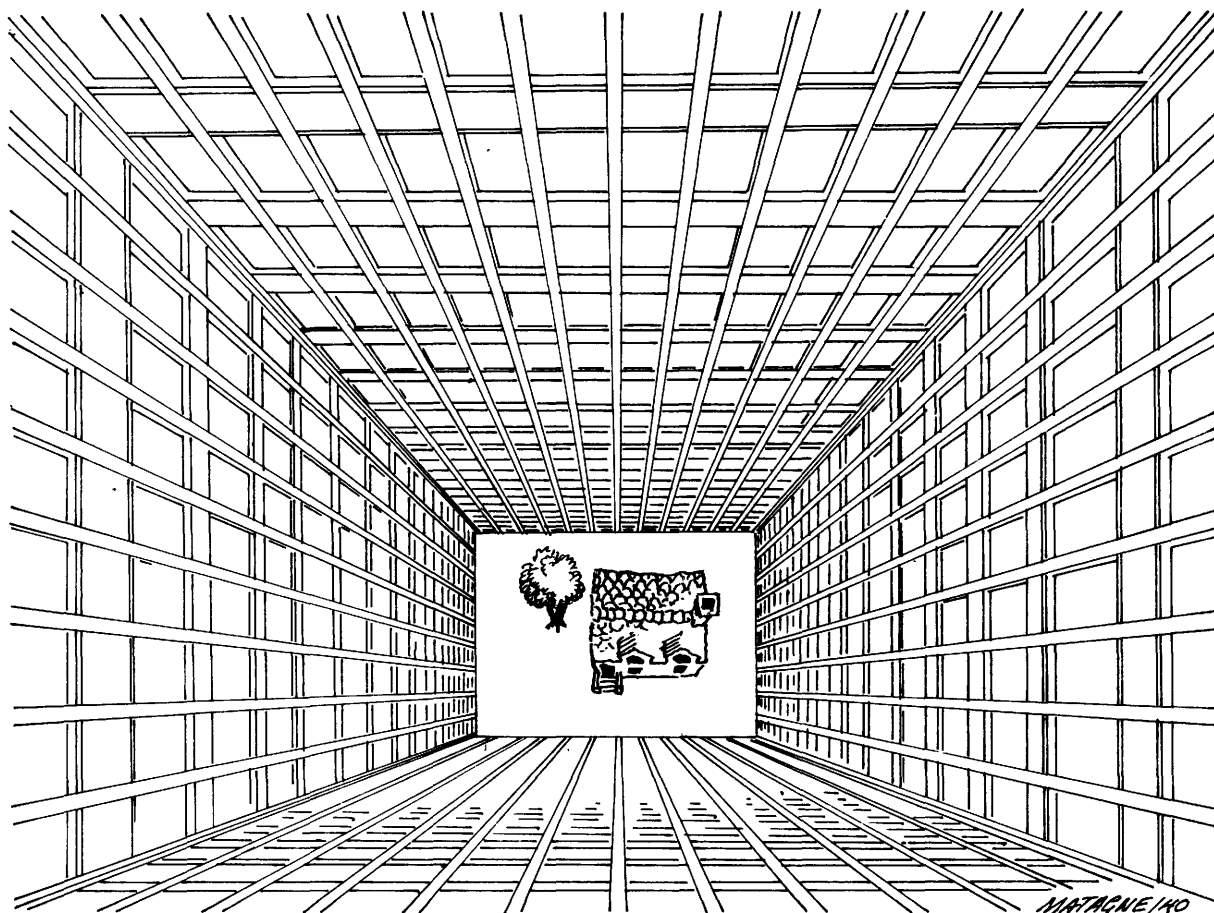
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Our towns : can dying centres be saved ?

(see page 3)

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IN THIS ISSUE

- ++ Our towns : can dying centres be saved ? (p. 3)
- ++ Television and the consumer (p. 3)
- ++ Unemployment in the Community (p. 3)
- ++ The Community and Lebanon (p.3)
- ++ More for the motorist (p. 4)
- ++ Skimmed milk for the third world (p. 4)
- ++ Jumbo hovercraft (p. 4)
- ++ An "environment label" (p. 5)
- ++ Europe hits the universities (p. 5)
- ++ Sand in the works (p.5)
- ++ Oil at the bottom of your garden ? (p. 5)
- ++ Two on trial (p. 6)
- ++ A Community Youth Orchestra (p. 6)

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++ OUR TOWNS : CAN DYING CENTRES BE SAVED

The Belgian association "Mens en Ruimte" (Man and space) has prepared a report on town centres and the environment at the request of the European Commission.

In ANNEX I Euroforum takes a look at some of the problems investigated by "Mens en Ruimte" and its suggestions for bringing life back in our towns.

++ TELEVISION AND THE CONSUMER

Television undoubtedly comes into its own as a mass media with programmes on consumer affairs. It does so quite simply by providing information on day-to-day problems. It is then for the consumer to buy what, where and as he likes.

In ANNEX 2 Euroforum relays the details it has received to date of the main programmes screened in Community countries.

++ UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

The latest figures for registered unemployment in the Community are given below :

			% change on the corresponding month of 1975
Belgium	October	230 751	+ 10 %
Denmark	September	111 900	- 4 %
France	September	955 352	+ 1 %
Germany	October	943 686	- 11 %
Ireland	September	106 762	+ 8 %
Italy	August	1 119 211	+ 6 %
Luxembourg	September	356	
Netherlands	October	205 152	+ 2 %
Great Britain) UK	1 395 770	+ 20 %
Northern Ireland		56 187	+ 16 %

++ THE COMMUNITY AND LEBANON

On a recent visit to Brussels, Mr. Ghassam Tueni, Lebanon's Social Affairs Minister, told the European Commission that his government was anxious to open negotiations for an overall cooperation agreement with the Community as soon as possible. He added that his government was also hoping that the Community would provide emergency aid to help meet the basic needs of the Lebanese people.

The European Community takes an extremely sympathetic view of Lebanon's dramatic situation and is quite prepared to negotiate an overall cooperation agreement. Meanwhile an initial series of emergency aid measures (food aid, medical supplies ...) is to be launched in close cooperation with the various international rescue operations being mounted.

++ MORE FOR THE MOTORIST

Windscreen wipers, windscreen washers, defrosting and demisting systems interior fittings : the European Commission has tackled a whole new range of car components in proposals for directives recently transmitted to the Community's Council of Ministers to guarantee drivers and passengers in all Community countries a safer, more comfortable ride.

++ SKIMMED MILK FOR THE THIRD WORLD

In 1977 developing countries will receive 105 000 t of skimmed milk powder under the Community's food aid programme - 45 000 t less than recommended by the European Commission in its proposal to the Community's Council of Ministers. The programme will cost 41.68 million units of account (1 u.a. = approx. \$ US 1.1), this figure covering the cost of the milk itself plus freight charges for some 80 000 t of the total.

It might be mentioned that large part of the 1976 programme (200 000 t in all) has not been distributed yet since negotiations with the countries involved are still in progress. Making bags of milk powder available is not everything ; they have still to reach their destination and the Community foots the bill in a limited number of cases only. Although it is difficult to give firm figures for freight charges, they average \$ 55 to \$ 60 a tonne. It is interesting to compare this figure with the 89 u.a. it costs to store a tonne of skimmed milk powder for a year.

++ JUMBO HOVERCRAFT

Since 1968 four million passengers and 600 000 vehicles have crossed the Channel on a cushion of air thanks to "Seaspeed", a service run by British Rail in cooperation with SNCF. And traffic on this service is growing steadily.

Before long jumbo hovercraft will be plying between Britain and the Continent, for the European Investment Bank has just granted a loan of £ 5 000 000 to "stretch" the two hovercraft which provide a shuttle service between Dover and Calais/Boulogne. The "stretched" hovercraft will be able to carry 446 passengers instead of the present 250 and 55 cars instead of the present 28. With deeper bellies and longer by seventeen metres they will be less prey to the whims of wind and wave. And they will continue to be the fastest way across the Channel pending construction of the "Chunnel" now postponed indefinitely.

++ AN "ENVIRONMENT LABEL"

The European Parliament's Committee on the Environment suggests that an environment label be awarded by an independent body to products which "occasion minimum pollution and waste in production and use". This proposal takes up an idea first mooted by Parliament three years ago when it urged the Community to promote the manufacture of goods which are durable, create little waste and are easily reprocessed.

++ EUROPE HITS THE UNIVERSITIES

The forthcoming elections to the European Parliament have created a new wave of interest in European integration. Enthusiasm is catching and in the university world interest is by no means restricted to students from the Nine. Far from it ; 130 applicants from 26 countries recently submitted details of research projects in the hope of receiving one of the European Commission's scholarships. Fifteen awards have been made : seven for research on the European Parliament and eight for research on other aspects of integration. Only two of the successful applicants come from outside Europe : one from Tunisia and the other from the United States.

++ SAND IN THE WORKS

Restrictive practices and market sharing are two big crimes against the common market and free competition. An example recently in the news was an agreement between the British sand producer and sand quarry operator, British Industrial Sand Ltd (BIS), and its Belgian counterpart, Sablières et Carrières Réunies S.A. (SCR). Under the agreement BIS was given the run of the British market, leaving SCR to operate on the Continent. A clause in the agreement allowed a director from the British company to sit on the Belgian board and vice versa, which meant in practice that confidential business information could be passed readily from one company to the other.

The European Commission, which is responsible for safeguarding free competition in the Community, has asked the two companies to terminate the agreement.

++ OIL AT THE BOTTOM OF YOUR GARDEN

If there's oil at the bottom of your garden you may well qualify for a Community subsidy ... The European Commission recently approved the terms of a notice - to be published in the Official Journal of the European Communities - inviting interested parties to apply before 28 February 1977 for "Community support for projects in the hydrocarbons sector". Community backing takes the form of repayable subsidies and is given to technological development projects directly associated with exploration, extraction, storage or transport calculated to make Community supplies of oil and gas more secure.

For obvious reasons each application must give full details of the project (techniques involved, cost, risks, profitability, its interest for the Community), the applicant and financing arrangements. This information will enable the European Commission to forward selected applications to the Community's Council of Ministers for consideration during 1977.

++ TWO ON TRIAL

The nine Community countries are given 18 months to bring their legislation into line with Community directives. Yet one of these directives - on the harmonization of standards for low-tension electrical appliances - adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers on 19 February 1973 has yet to be applied by Belgium and Italy. The European Commission has therefore decided to bring up the big guns and refer the matter to the Court of Justice of the European Communities.

In fairness to Belgium and Italy we must admit that no Community country was in a particular hurry to apply this directive. In fact Ireland was the only one to meet the deadline. Denmark is a special case in that it was allowed five years to adapt to Community rules. The seven defaulting States received a formal warning last year and all of them have now complied - with the exception of Belgium and Italy. Hence the European Commission's decision to initiate proceedings.

++ A COMMUNITY YOUTH ORCHESTRA

"Music is an expensive noise," said Leopold II of Belgium, a monarch for whom music had few charms. Fortunately the European Parliament views it differently and has given a warm welcome to the creation of a European Community Youth Orchestra, brainchild of the International Festival of Youth Orchestras Foundation.

The orchestra will be formed every year from amongst the best young musicians in the nine Community countries. There will be about a hundred players in all. The orchestra will assemble during the Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and summer holidays and will perform in Community capitals. Further information can be obtained from Mrs. Joy Bryer, Secretary-General of the International Festival of Youth Orchestras, 24 Cadogan Square, London SW1.

OUR TOWNS : CAN DYING CENTRES BE SAVED ?

There is nothing new about urban renewal. In the European context, only legends talk of towns springing up out of nowhere. Romulus, who traced the limits of Rome with his ploughshare, must have been the last European town planner to enjoy such a luxury. Since his day architects and planning authorities have been able to do little more than adapt towns to social change, if not to the needs of their inhabitants.

The past

Sometimes public works served as a symbol of political grandeur (for instance, in Berlin at the time of German unification) or indeed as a political weapon (in Paris, for example, where Baron Haussmann's "strategic improvements" made it possible to control demonstrations). At the end of World War II, the authorities' main concern was public health : shanty towns had proliferated on the Continent after the fighting and bombing while housing conditions in industrial cities in the United Kingdom were considered intolerable.

Many new projects were launched in the Sixties after the period of reconstruction. But at that time towns were thought of purely as administrative and commercial centres. Housing, it was felt, should be concentrated on the outskirts and the mobility provided by the car encouraged the trend. This was the golden age of suburbia.

A turning point came in 1965 when the authorities woke up to the fact that the urban environment should be preserved, that activities associated with economic expansion should take their place alongside former functions. Since then, the tendency has been to encourage people to move out of suburban dormitories and bring life back to town centres which had become completely deserted at night. The importance of renovating and restoring historic buildings has also been recognized.

Nowadays, all Community countries are hoping to call a halt to the decline of town centres by encouraging developers to build their offices in outlying districts, by renovating old accommodation, by preserving historical areas and improving existing commercial centres.

A modern example

Denmark is singled out for special mention in the report on town centres prepared by Mens en Ruimte (Man and space) at the request of the European Commission.

More than any other Community country, Denmark has succeeded in slotting urban development into overall environmental planning.

It has a whole armoury of laws which allow the authorities to take effective action. A Ministry for the Environment was set up in 1972 and given responsibility not only for monitoring pollution but also for town planning and the preservation of historic buildings and silts.

The most striking feature of urban renewal in Denmark is the prevalence of small-scale projects ; large-scale schemes are rare, mainly because the funds are not available.

Furthermore a determined effort is made to avoid destroying the original character of a town : the existing form is preserved, the scale of old and new buildings is altered as little as possible. At times development in the form of shops, offices and car parks is stopped to make way for housing.

Moreover, urban development in Denmark is based on social and economic considerations and local inhabitants are invariably consulted beforehand.

Many approaches

Each type of town has its own special problems. The Mens en Ruimte report suggests that towns and cities be classified by their functions and physical features, since functions change over the years and affect physical features and (vice versa).

There are four types of town centre :

- 1) Old historical centres which have changed little but must serve as modern town centres (Chester, Bruges, Middleburg, Venice, Roskilde, Florence).
- 2) Old centres which have been absorbed and surrounded by more modern centres (Rouen, Brussels, Antwerp, Milan, Hamburg, Munich, Copenhagen, Bonn).
- 3) Town centres dating from the industrial revolution with decaying working class and industrial areas close by (Birmingham, Glasgow, Dortmund).
- 4) New towns which have grown into big cities : no clear functions and modern buildings (Aberdeen, Brest, Toronto, Wolfsburg).

New functions or new demands create problems for a town ; the solution will vary with the type of town.

Thus, some towns have yielded to heavy demand and allowed offices to produce a radical change in townscapes (Brussels, London, Liverpool, Frankfurt). Others have preferred to move the office district away from the old town (Paris, Utrecht, Hamburg, Essen, Rome).

There are two possible approaches to commerce : new centres can be established away from the old shopping districts to serve new residential areas or shopping areas in the old centres can be improved by closing streets to traffic, building arcades, creating shopping precincts and generally improving amenities (benches, street lighting ...)

Housing is another problem. Yet towns which have been promoting a return to the centre (London, Edinburgh, Berlin, Toulouse, Copenhagen, Bologna, Ancona, Essen, Amsterdam) are finding themselves hampered by too much old accommodation, the high price of building land, a relatively old and poor local population and "untouchable" historical buildings.

What can be done within the existing legal and administrative framework to achieve the desired result ?

Planning rules and regulations

Only 50 % of Community countries have national or regional town planning laws. Town plans set out a detailed strategy, lay down guidelines and specify requirements. Their impact on urban development varies depending on whether the planning authority is centralized or not.

At local level towns can control their own development by drawing up outline plans or plans for specific areas or districts.

The authorities' main weapon in pushing through redevelopment projects is compulsory purchase . But they can also stop short of compulsory purchase and merely request owners to fall in with redevelopment plans.

When they want to improve roads, extend pedestrian precincts, develop public transport, provide parks or squares, plant trees and reduce air pollution or noise, the authorities can attack on two points : they can use the public funds available for this purpose and at the same time introduce appropriate regulations.

Clearly, improving the urban environment requires vast sums of money. With the exception of countries such as Germany where the towns are fairly autonomous, any major expenditure becomes a national issue, taking power away from the towns themselves. Central governments foot the bulk of the bill for operating expenses, the largest item in a town budget. The Mens en Ruimte study points out that it is therefore essential that urban renewal be recognized as a national priority.

Community do's and don'ts

The European Community can influence town planning policy nine countries. For instance, its decisions on air pollution (exhaust gases, compounds in petrol) will have repercussions on town centres. But what the European Community really needs is agreed guidelines on the urban environment. Some of the suggestions put forward in the Mens en Ruimte report are given below :

- ° the destruction of old but structurally sound buildings in town centres should be opposed ;
- ° more districts should be marked out for protection by encouraging the renovation of old buildings.

- ° any obstacles or policies which prevent people from all income groups and backgrounds finding accommodation in town centres should be eliminated;
- ° any rules or regulations that might encourage owners to allow their property to deteriorate into slums should be repealed ;
- ° all types of urban development should be strictly controlled by means of zoning laws and area plans ;
- ° town improvements should be made the joint responsibility of public authorities and private property owners ;
- ° the construction of new accommodation and the provision of transport facilities should be coordinated ;
- ° a strategy to reduce traffic in town centres should be developed
- ° public transport should be improved ;
- ° all sections of the population should be involved from the outset in the formulation of development plans.

This is the price we must pay if we are to infuse life into dying town centres.

TELEVISION AT THE EUROPEAN CONSUMER'S SERVICE

Television undoubtedly comes into its own as a mass media with programmes on consumer affairs. It does so quite simply by providing information on day-to-day problems. It is then for the consumer to buy what, where and as he likes.

Here are the details we have received of the main consumer affairs programmes screened in Community countries.

GERMANY

Plusminus (twice a month on Thursday at 20.15 on Germany 1) is a magazine programme on economic affairs jointly produced by Westdeutscher Rundfunk (Köln), Norddeutscher Rundfunk (Hamburg), Bayerischer Rundfunk (Munich), Südwestfunk (Baden-Baden) and Saarländischer Rundfunk (Saarbrücken). It regularly deals with topics of interest to consumers.

Nach Ladenschluss (literally "after the shops have closed") (once a month on Friday from 20.15 to 21.00 on Südwest 3 and Hessen 3) is a live programme in which consumers, representatives of consumer associations and lawyers discuss recurring consumer problems with wholesalers, retailers, producers, tradesmen, farmers and government representatives.

Consumers who wish to air their grievances or draw attention to a specific problem write to the producers and, if the case proves interesting, are invited to take part in a studio discussion with those concerned.

Wirtschaft 76 (once a month on Friday at 20.15 on Südwest 3) is a magazine programme on economic affairs, the main feature of which is a "Theken-Gespräch" (the German equivalent of a chat in the snug) : the compère acts as waiter in a café where three consumers discuss a current topic of immediate interest to them on an informal basis with representatives of the authorities, consumer associations and traders.

UNITED KINGDOM

Anglia Television is one of the fourteen regional companies which form the British commercial network. Some of its programmes are transmitted nationally, others are shown in East Anglia only.

Over the last eighteen months it screened two thirteen-week series dealing with the perennially interesting subject of food. These went out on Friday afternoons and investigated the food industry, its policies, practices and problems.

A number of films are being prepared. A Crop of Complaints deals with the controversy that flares up every year over chemical spraying of crops from the air. Another hour-long film, to be shown nationally, will deal with the British police force and its concern about growing crime rates.

A Ripe Old Age, a series of six programmes recently shown throughout the United Kingdom, looked at the problems of old age, retirement and loss of income.

About Anglia, Anglia Television's evening information magazine, often covers subjects of direct interest to consumers. The company screens a weekly programme called Probe dealing with the region's political problems and plans to produce a new industrial and municipal affairs series in 1977.

Lastly, there is Survival, a series covering a wide range of environmental problems throughout the world.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Britain's non-commercial network, broadcasts several programmes on consumer affairs.

Public Eye, the main theme of which is the use of financial, material and human resources, goes out once a fortnight as part of Nationwide, a news and current affairs programme broadcast each weekday at 18.20 on BBC 1. It sets out to scrutinize decisions taken by the government and various branches of trade and industry to see how they will affect the man-in-the-street.

From 2 January 1977 until the end of May, That's Life will be back on BBC 1 every Sunday evening at 21.15. The programme, which is forty minutes long, is divided into two parts, one rather serious, the other in lighter vein.

A singer who presents a specially-written song of the week and a humorist who reads amusing newspaper misprints sent in by viewers are sandwiched between the more serious items. There is usually a short sequence of light-hearted High Street interviews : in one of these people were blindfolded and asked to distinguish red wine from white.

Each serious section of the programme begins with a viewer's letter. The production team receives something between 500 and 700 letters a day, selects a reasonable number for investigation and with the producer's agreement follows them up as any journalist would. Six stories are finally chosen for use on the programme some trivial (e.g. dispute between a cricket club and a householder whose windows have been broken), some serious (negligence, delay, fraud). In fact all the problems dealt with arise out of viewers' letters, the aim being to prevent other people falling into the same trap or making the same mistakes. Objectivity is the keynote ; both parties' points of view are presented and their names are given.

"We want to show that no subject is too trivial or too vast for us", says the producer. "We don't set out to reform the world every Sunday evening but we like to think we're making quite a contribution towards higher standards of courtesy, efficiency and honesty in relations between consumers and suppliers".

NETHERLANDS

Koning-Klant (King Customer), produced for Dutch television by VARA, has been on the go for more than eight years and is the only television programme in the Netherlands entirely devoted to consumer affairs. Broadcast once a fortnight from September to June it presents twenty-five minutes of enquiry, comment and filmed report : the texts of these reports are available to viewers free. Correctly drafted complaints are forwarded to consumer associations, lawyers and ad hoc committees. When a suitable subject comes up, the team works on it in conjunction with the consumer associations.

BELGIUM

BRT, Belgium's Dutch-language television network, broadcasts a programme called Wikken en Wegen (For and Against) every second Monday at 21.35. First screened in 1973 it takes the form of a magazine dealing with different consumer problems in turn : food legislation, public services ...

A news slot was introduced in 1975. Now that brand and manufacturers' names are being given the programme is being taken more and more seriously. Consumer associations play no direct part in the programme but it does draw on the opinions of a Commission set up by Royal Decree comprising experts from the various consumer associations, social groupings and family associations.

There is no advertising on Belgian radio or television but the spread of cable television means that more and more people are receiving the full range of programmes from neighbouring countries : the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, France and for viewers living near the coast the United Kingdom.

RTB, the French-language network, broadcasts a 20 minute programme called Si vous saviez (If only you knew) once a fortnight. Each programme concentrates on a single topic (crash helmets, money-lending ads ...), often but not always with the help of consumer associations. All kinds of presentation are used, from straight reporting to didactic fables. Brands and names can be mentioned where necessary for clarity but no advertising of any kind is allowed ; the programme cannot recommend "best buys" for instance.

Comptes à rendre (Called to Account), a bi-monthly production lasting about an hour, arranges a live face-to-face encounter between a consumer who has a complaint about a product or a service and the producers and distributors. The discussion introduced by short filmed sequence, takes place in front of a small studio audience which is encouraged to join in.

Conseils aux consommateurs (Tips for the consumer) a short programme broadcast on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, tries to be topical. For instance, when the schools re-opened in the autumn canteens and the practice of compelling pupils to buy certain articles in school were tackled. At present Children's shoes and toys are being featured as 6 December a red-letter day in the Belgian child's calendar, approaches.

FRANCE

French television companies are bound by law to relay consumer information. Their charters specify that they must broadcast "consumer information programmes on prices and quality of goods and the avoidance of waste".

Apart from their own programmes, all companies are compelled to give peak viewing time to programmes produced by the National Consumer Institute or by consumer associations. A "Commission for the Education and Protection of Consumers by Audio-Visual Means" is responsible for seeing that this is done. These compulsory programmes are Six minutes pour vous défendre (Six Minutes for Your Protection) (on TF 1 on Saturday at 19.10) ; D'accord-pas d'accord (Yes - No) on A 2 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 20.25) and various slots prepared by the regional unions of consumer associations for regional magazine programmes (ninety seconds once a week on FR 3 between 19.20 and 19.40)

The television companies' own programmes are :

- ° on TF 1 : A la bonne heure (That's better !) (Mondays to Fridays from 18.05 to 18.30) which often features consumer topics as does Une minute pour les femmes (A Moment for the Ladies) (daily at 19.40)
- ° on A 2 : a specialized magazine A vos marques (On the mark), co-production with the National Consumer Institute, broadcast every second Saturday from 12.30 to 13.00, and Aujourd'hui Madame (Today) which goes out on weekdays from 14.05 to 15.00, and deals with a variety of subjects including consumer topics ;
- ° On FR 3 : Vendredi (Friday) (20.00 to 21.30) deals with the consumer in relation to public services.

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